

US culture advisers resign in protest over looting of Iraqi museums

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Three members of the White House Cultural Property Advisory Committee have resigned in protest over US complicity in the looting of the Iraqi National Museum of Antiquities.

Martin E. Sullivan, Richard S. Lanier and Gary Vikan, each appointed by former president Bill Clinton, denounced the Bush administration for failing to protect Iraq's artistic and cultural treasures. Sullivan, the chairman of the 11-member panel, told Reuters News Service, "It didn't have to happen. In a preemptive war that's the kind of thing you plan for."

In his letter of resignation dated April 14, Sullivan, who chaired the advisory committee since 1995, wrote: "The reports in recent days about the looting of Iraq's National Museum of Antiquities and the destruction of countless artifacts that document the cradle of Western civilization have troubled me deeply, a feeling that is shared by many other Americans."

He continued: "The tragedy was not prevented, due to our nation's inaction." He added that the US president was "burdened by a compelling moral obligation to plan for and prevent indiscriminate looting and destruction."

Gary Vikan said he resigned because the US military had advance warning of the danger to Iraqi museums and other cultural institutions. "We certainly know the value of oil, but we certainly don't know the value of historical artifacts," Vikan told Reuters on Thursday.

Richard S. Lanier criticized "the administration's total lack of sensitivity and forethought regarding... the loss of cultural treasures."

Sullivan is executive director of the Historic Saint Mary's City Commission, dedicated to one of the first British colonies, in the state of Maryland. Vikan is director of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland. Lanier is director of the Trust for Mutual

Understanding in New York.



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